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LETTERS OF JOHN RUTLEDGE

Annotated by JOSEPH W. BARNWELL

(Continued from the October number)

Salisbury Nov. 26. 1780

Gent,—

I have just rec^d., by the person whom I sent to Hillsbor^o., your favours of the 10th. & 24th. ult^o., & observe with pleasure, what you say, respecting a Letter to the King of France—I hope Congress will send several Copies of it—each.¹ by a Gentleman of Address, Sense, & Spirit, Master of the subject, & well acquainted with the French Language, who will, without offence, or the fear of giving it, make a full & true Representation of our Affairs—I believe nothing else is necessary to obtain from France, immediate & ample Supplies of Money, cloathing, Tents, Arms & military Stores, & a suff^t. Aid of Troops & Ships—an Early & vigorous Campaign w^d. give us Independence—that sh^d. be the first object of France & America—and our utmost Efforts used to obtain it, as soon as possible—The Chevalier² & Marquis are warm friends of America—They will, if requested, give us their influence & Interest—I wish the Marquis w^d. be personally an Advocate for America, with his Prince—an Application from Gen^l. Washington w^d. have considerable Effect in France—& a confidential Officer, sent by him, to concert measures, with the French Minister of War, w^d. do more, than can be expected, from our Plenipotentiary at Versailles, with the Count deVergennes—

It is a melancholy Reflection (when we consider our inexhaustible resources, & powerful alliance) that there sh^d. be a British Soldier on the Continent and intolerable that, in the present Stage of the War, our Affairs sh^d. be in such a wretched Condition, as

¹ It was not until a year after this letter was written that Col. John Laurens was sent by Washington as a Special Envoy to the Court of France with excellent results. In Vol. 1, page 13, of this *Magazine* will be found considerable correspondence between Laurens and others as to his work in France.

² Anne-Cérar, Chevalier de la Luzerne then French Minister to the United States. “The Marquis” was of course LaFayette.

they are—I am persuaded that nothing wth. can retrieve them will be omitted by you.—Col. Marion had a successful Skirmish some Weeks ago, with a party of Tories³—the enclosed Extract of his Letter to me will give you the particulars—It is said, here, that Tarlton attacked Sumpter last Thursday,⁴ & was repulsed with the Loss of upwards of 100 killed & wounded—that Tarlton is mortally wounded (but was carried off) that only one Man was killed on our side & that Sumpter was slightly wounded in the Arm (the ball was cut out) & retreated pretty high up the Country, apprehending that the Enemy were ab^t. to attack him, in great force—I give you this News, as we have it—There is no official Acco^t. come, of it, but, it is told, with great appearance of Credibility—However We must not publish, till We are sure of it,—I repeat my request, that you will transmit to me, with the greatest dispatch, every material Occurrence, and am wth. great Respect.

Gent

yr. most obed Ser^t.

J: Rutledge

P.S. I shall set off, as soon as I close this Packet, for Charlotte—

Charlotte Dec^r. 8th, 1780

Gent.—

At Salisbury, I wrote to you a very long Letter, beg^g ab^t. the 20th & end^d. ab^t. the 27th. ult^o., & deliv^d. it, on that day to Mr. Baird, who was just then setting off for Lancaster—He promised, if he went, immediately from thence, to Philad^{ia}. to deliver it, if not, to send it pr Express, so that, I presume, you will receive it, in a few days from this Date—The enclosed will give you our latest News from C: Town, and an Acc^ot of Gen^l. Sumpter's Engagem^t., with Wemyss & Tarlton, of Col. Marion's with some Tories, & of L; Col. Washington's success agst. Rugeley;⁵ but, what do all these things avail, towards the grant point of regg. our Country, the distresses of which I want words to describe,—On the 29th. ult^o. I went to Col. Watson's in the New Acquisition⁶ (S^o. Carolina,) ab^t. 20

³ At Black Mingo, September 14, 1780.

⁴ At Blackstocks, November 20, 1780. Sumter's wound kept him out of the field for some time to the serious detriment of his command.

⁵ The capture of Rugeley's fortified house and 112 men on Dec. 4, 1780 by threatening him a log or wth logs resembling Artillery.

⁶ York County.

Miles from hence, to confer with Gen^l. Sumpter, who had been removed thither—it was really melancholy to see the desolate Condition of poor Hills Plantⁿ; & the Situation of his family—all his fine Iron Works, Mills, dwelling House & Build^s. of every kind, even his negroe Houses, reduced to Ashes, and his wife and Children in a little Log-Hut—I was shocked to see the ragged, shabby Condition, of our brave & virtuous Men, who w^d. not remain in the power of the Enemy, but have taken to Arms—This, however, is but a faint description of the Suffering of our unfortunate Country for, it is beyond a Doubt, that the Enemy have hanged many of our People, who, from fear, & the Impracticab^y. of removing, had given Paroles, & who, from Attachm^t. to our side, had joined it—nay, Tarlton has, since the action at Blackstock's, hung one Capt. Johnston, a Magistrate of respectable Character—They have also burnt a prodigious N^o. of Houses, & turned a vast many Women, formerly of affluent, or, easy fortune, wth. their children, almost naked, into the Woods—Tarlton at Gen^l. Richardson's Widows, exceeded his usual Barbarity, for having dined in her House, he not only burnt it, after plundering every thing contained, but having drove into the Barn a N^o. of Cattle, Hogs, Poultry, he consumed them, together with the Barn, & the Corn in it, in one general Blaze, & this because he pretended to believe, that the poor old Gen^l. was with the Rebel-Army, tho', had he open'd his grave, before the Door, he might have seen the Contrary—Many more of the Staunchest Inhab^t. of C:T: (it is said ab^t. 90,) have been sent, ab^t a Fortnight ago to St. August^e., & others are to follow—I have not been able to procure a list of them—I believe none is published, but, I recollect that Mr. A: Middleton⁷ is of the Number—Mr. Gadsden is confined to the Castle, the rest of the first sett are on Parol, in the Town—Col; C: C. Pinckney's family are turned out of his House—In short the Enemy seem determined, if they can, to break every Man's Spirit, & if they can^t., to ruin him—Engage-m^{ts}., of Capitulation, & Proclamations, are no Security ag^t their oppression & Cruelties—they make a great Parade of Mr. Middleton, "*formerly Presid^t of the Con^{tl} Congress,*" & old Mr. Manigault having applied to be admitted as British Subjects, w^{ch} they have been—Indeed, I fear many will follow their

⁷ The signer of the Declaration of Independence and son of Henry Middleton mentioned afterwards in this letter.

Example—the unfort^e affair, near Camden, the want of any Support ever since, & the little prospect of any, have affected the Conduct of many, who were well disposed, & whose Hearts may, perhaps, still be wth us—Our last acco^{ts} from Virg^a, are, that th^e Enemy, who had embarked on App^r. of a Fleet, supposing they might be French, (probably the Transports from N.York for C.Town, as Ment^d in the *So. Carolina Gazette* of 27th ult^o) had relanded, on discovering them to be friends, & that a Reinforcem^t was expected in Virg^a—If so, & the Reinforcem^{ts} expected in C: T: have arrived, or should arrive, (which they probably will, if they have not already,) instead of moving down—w^d. it is likely that our Maneuvres may be of the retrograde kind—Indeed, the present prospect is truly gloomy—very different from what you, at Philad^a, conceive it, if you credit w^{ch} I presume you do, (willing to catch at good news however improbable,) such Intelligence as that published in Dunlap’s Paper of 4th. ult^o. said to come from Richmond—Gen^l Green arrived here the 2^d Inst^t.—he left Baron Steuben to command, for the present, in Virginia—if the Baron is to take Rank of Smallwood, he will leave us; However, you will hear from him, on that Head. Gen^l. Green will establish expresses from hence, to Hillsbor^o. (none having been yet app^d.) and have all the Expresses, from hence, to Philad^a. put upon the best Footing, for Regularity, & dispatch so that I hope, in future, to hear from you, at least once a Week—oftener, if you have any thing material to communicate—no acco^{ts}. from C.Town, or elsewhere, respecting the Spaniards going ag^t S^t. Augustine, or Pensacola—your Intelligence from Havanna, I think, must be ill founded—Inclosed I send, for your Information, and the Information of Congress & the Chev.^r (but it sh^d go no further) an Acco^t of the Enemy’s Strength, & Posts in S^o. Carolina & Georgia, & of our Force in S^o.C. & this State—from which you may readily form a just opinion of Affairs in this Quarter—I have given Gen^l. Green, a Copy of this Acco^t. of the Enemy’s Strength & Posts, w^{ch} probably he will transmit & I refer you to his Acco^t of our Strength, but I believe you will find mine pretty accurate—Gen^l. Gates, in his last Letter to the Board of War (which pray peruse,) expressed his Sentiments, very fully, requesting Supplies, (or rather the Want of ’em) for the Southern Army—I am fully persuaded of your Attention, to every Measure which I have recommended, but it is

truly mortifying, to find so much Inattention, in the department whose Business it is to furnish Supplies for the Army, very few of the Articles, ordered for the Southern department, have ever reached the Army, what have come are received in Driblets, & exceeding bad order, so as to be of little if any service—such, Conduct is shameful—what can you expect from an Army who are in want of everything—There must be some strange Mismanagement, in your executive department, (which Sh^d be enquired into, & corrected) or this w^d not happen, unless indeed, the supplies, ordered, can^t. be had for want of Money—if that is the Case, it is ridiculous to order a Board of War to furnish Supplies, when they have not the Means of procuring 'em—it is only tantalising us, & productive of the worst Consequences—but why have they not Money?—I am told every Article which is wanted may be procured in Phil^a. for Money, or Bills,—Why will not Congress draw?—Surely it is our Policy, to draw, for neither France, Spain, or Holland, will venture, however they may threaten, to protest your Bills—How do you expect to carry on the War, without Money? Taxes where a Country is attacked, or possessed by the Enemy can^t. be collected, to keep pace with the demands for it—The Presid^t. of Congress has transmitted to me, their Resolve of Oct. 30th., on the Appointm^t. of Gen^l. Green to the Southern Command—His Army is to consist of all the Regular Reg^{ts}. & Corps raised, or to be raised, from the States of Delaware to Georgia, inclusive—this sounds high—but, what that Army is, at present, you see—& what it is likely to be, if composed only of such forces, you may judge—I will try what can be done wth. N^o. Carolina, as to raising a permanent Corps of Regulars—Several Gent. think the Measure will go down, when the Assembly meets next M^o—I am not so sanguine, but even, if it does, when will they be equipt, & embodied, fit for Service?—how men will be obtained, in S^o. Carolina or Georgia, with^t. money, or cloathing, I know not—upon the whole, Gent., it appears to me, that the Enemy in S^o. Carolina are or soon will be, reinforced—that the Troops in Virg^a., under Leslie, will also be reinforced—that it is probable, they will endeavour to effect a Junction, in N^o. Carolina, &, if they make such an Attempt, in force, they will receive considerable Aid from N^o. & S^o. Carolina, that they will either effect such Junction, or in attempt-

ing it, will ravage & distress this State, &, as I can't conceive the Policy of suffering the main Army, & the French Troops, to remain in Winter-Quarters, in the Eastern States, (where they can have nothing to fear,) instead of opposing the Enemy's vigorous operations in the Southern—I request, & exhort you, to use your utmost Influence, & endeavours, to obtain, as soon as possible, such Aid from the Grand Army, and from the Forces of his Most Christian Majesty, as may not only check the further progress of the Enemy tow^{ds}. this State, but regain every part of S^o. Carolina & Georgia—& that you will have the proper departments furnished with the Money necessary for procuring, & forwarding, all the Supplies which are wanted—that you will particularly, press the sending 'em quite on to this Army, (not to be stop'd, or delayed, in Virg^a. or N^o. Carol^a.) under the Charge of a trusty person to attend 'em the whole Way—I think Gen^l. Washington's presence, for a little while, this Way w^d. have a very happy Effect—I wish he w^d. come, & see with his own Eyes, the Importance of doing something effectual, for S^o. Carolina, for really, hitherto, every thing has been trifling—He might return before he c^d. be wanted at the Northward—

Suppose we c^d. raise Troops in S^o. Carolina, how could they be Officer'd, according to the Resolve of Congress of Oct; 21st.—the Officers of our Cont^l. Battalions being Prisoners of War—I wish to hear from you, on that point—I do not see how Men c^d. be appointed to command these Regiments—& this Circumstance is, therefore, an effectual Bar to any Attempt to raise Men—I wish to know, as the Enemy have certainly broke the Capitulation of C. Town, in many Instances, whether Congress w^d. approve of the Cont^l. Officers, who are on Parole, at Haddrell's point, coming, or being bro^t. off—as I think such a Measure might be effected, if approved by Congress, but with^t. their Consent, it sh^d. not be attempted—This, however, must be kept a profound Secret—otherwise the Attempt might fail, & our Friends be ill treated—I observe Gen^l. Green is impowered to make Exchanges of Prisoners in the Southern departm^t.—but, whom have we to exchange, for our Continental Officers, & Soldiers in C. Town?—I wish to know the Idea of Congress respecting the Exchange of our Inhabitants taken in Arms, with the Enemy—you recollect, that we have al-

ways looked upon the exchanging 'em as a dangerous preced^t. Does the power given to Gen^l. Green, of making Exchanges, extend to such persons, whose Lives & Fortunes are by our Laws of Treason forfeited? I sh^d. think not, for, if we exchange them, We certainly acquit 'em from the Offence of taking up Arms agst their Country, & allow the Enemy to recruit their Armies, with impunity, in our States—but, it may be said, if we do not, how are our Militia to be exchanged?—I don't know what practice has prevailed, on this point, in the Eastern States, where I presume there laws, agst., their People taking up Arms, with the Enemy, are similar to ours—but, there sh^d be an Uniformity of Conduct, in the several States, on this Head—pray, therefore, be explicit on it—& be pleased to inform me, as soon as possible, of the Sentiments of Congress on these several Points—also, what Steps are taken, or taking, for relief of the Southern States, & what Certainty there is, of our receiving real & substantial, Aid, & when We may depend on obtaining it—I think you have employed the Eagle Pilot Boat very well, & that she may be continued in the same service—if the Letters w^{ch}. were intercepted, on the Way from Cornwallis' Camp at Charlotte, to C:Town, & w^{ch}. Gen^l. Gates sent to Congress, are deciphered, pray let me know their Contents—Should any Overtures of Peace be made, (tho' I see no Prospect of them at present,) I trust that Congress will never listen to a treaty of uti possidetis, whilst the Enemy hold any part of the 13 States; However, it will be best to use your utmost Exertions to recover S^o. Carolina, as far as possible, lest We sh^d. be obliged to accept such Terms—I request your Endeavours to effect an Exchange of our Prisoners in S^o. Carolina, as soon as you can, and your Attention to having 'em supplied, as well as possible, during their Captivity—By return of the 2^d. flag, you will know what Articles were most wanted, & pray dont fail to send 'em—if a French Force sh^d. really be coming this way, give us Notice of their intent^a., in Time for us to make the necessary Preparations for them—

I am with great Regard & Esteem

Gent. y^r. most obed^t. Serv^t.

J: Rutledge

P.S. Sumpter will not be able to take the Field in less than 3 or 4 Weeks—He is bro^t. up to a House ab^t. 10 Miles below this

place—& I shall go down, wth. Gen^l. Green, ToMorrow to see him,⁸ & converse on many Points, on w^{ch}. he is well informed.

P.S. Pray communicate that part of this Letter w^{ch}. relates to the Enemy's & our force this way⁹ & the Enemy's Ravages in So. Carolina to the Chevalier—if the Express does not go off too soon I will write to him (the Chev^r.) and refer him to you for information.

The Delegates of S^o. Carolina in Congress

Turn over

I find the same difficulty subsists with respect to filling the N^o. Carolina Continental Battalions as does with respect to those of S^o. Carolina.—the N^o. Carolina Officers being also Pris^{rs}. of War.—How can this difficulty be removed? See the Resolve of Congress passed in Oct^r. & abovement^d.

⁸ The meeting referred to took place and Greene was much impressed with Sumter's enterprise. Sumter Correspondence, *Charleston Year Book 1899*, Appendix, page 73.

⁹ The "Accont" of the opposing forces referred to in this letter will be published in the next issue of this Magazine.

(*To be continued.*)